

December 8, 2007

POWER TABLES

Centro, Des Moines, Iowa

By CLARE LESCHIN-HOAR
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As its name implies, Centro is located in the heart of downtown Des Moines, Iowa, near the campaign headquarters of several presidential hopefuls. Floor-to-ceiling glass walls look onto busy Locust and 10th streets, and an open floor plan stretching from bar to kitchen gives the dining room a see-and-be-seen vibe. During campaign season, as long as hungry customers and political staffers keep arriving, chef and owner George Formaro keeps the kitchen humming well past closing time.

Recent Sightings


Former Sen. John Edwards (D., N.C.), who frequently orders the crab-cake salad, is said to be a good tipper. Former Gov. Mitt Romney (R., Mass.) sat at table 50 near the windows, with a view of the coal-fired pizza ovens. Sen. Barack Obama (D., Ill.) often orders the halibut or grilled salmon with steamed vegetables while holding dinner meetings and interviews in the private dining room.

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THE REGULARS




Sen. **Chris Dodd** (D., Conn.) dines at Centro two to three times a week when in Iowa and favors table 34. A Yankees fan, the presidential candidate watched much of the baseball playoffs at the bar and, more recently, celebrated his sister's birthday there.




Preferring a table to a booth, Sen. **Joe Biden** (D., Del.) books lunch several times a month when he's in Iowa. His favorite spot is table 34.



J. Barry Griswell, chairman and chief executive of Des Moines-based Principal Financial Group, has served Centro's brick-oven pizzas to guests in the private dining room and has booked the entire restaurant for business functions.



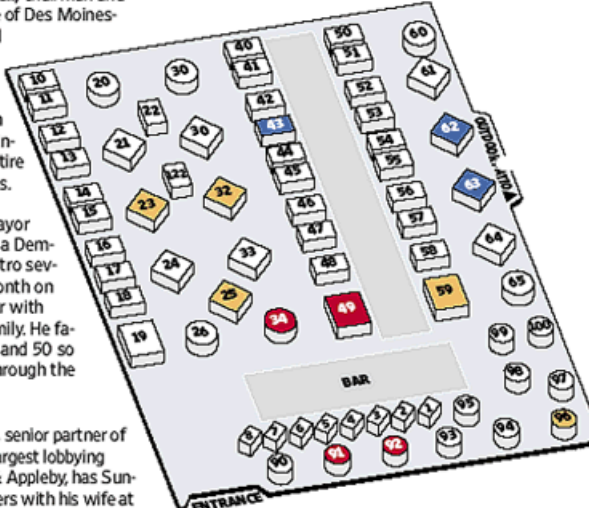
Des Moines Mayor **Frank Cownie**, a Democrat, is at Centro several times a month on city business or with friends and family. He favors tables 40 and 50 so he can chat with Mr. Formaro through the open kitchen.



James Carney, senior partner of one of Iowa's largest lobbying firms, Carney & Appleby, has Sunday-night dinners with his wife at banquet table 58. Mr. Carney's favorite is the pizza with hamburger, mushroom, onion and green peppers.

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Table 34 and banquet table 49 are thought to be the best in the house, with clear views of much of the restaurant. Both seats are prime spots to see who's coming and going. The restaurant's high-energy atmosphere can best be appreciated while seated at tables 50-51 and 60-61 near the flame-flickering pizza oven. The sought-after seats at the bar (1-8) and tables 90-96 are popular for drinks after work, and all sport views of the downtown skyline.



FLOORPLAN KEY:
■ A ++ LIST ■ A+ LIST ■ A LIST

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